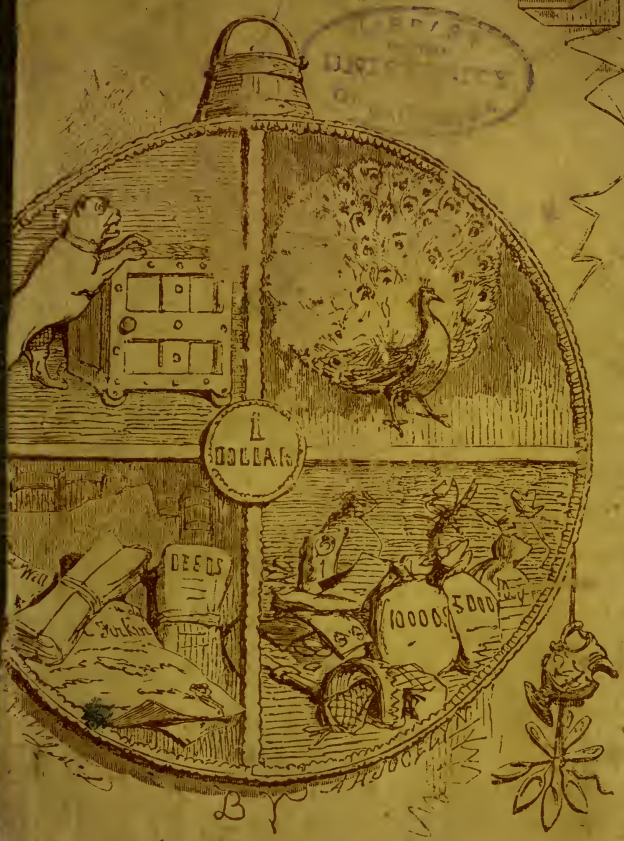
TWO MILLIONS



Wm. ALLEN BUTLER

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TWO MILLIONS.

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN BUTLER,

AUTHOR OF "NOTHING TO WEAR."

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON & CO., 346 & 348 BROADWAY.
1858.

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TO

The Phi Beta Kappa Society

OF YALE COLLEGE,

THIS POEM,

WRITTEN AT THEIR REQUEST,

AND DELIVERED BEFORE THEM,

JULY 28, 1858,

IS DEDICATED.

'*Fool*,' *said my Muse to me*, '*look in thy heart and write!*'

So sang in other days that gentle Knight,
Gentlest and bravest, in undying song,
Like his own temper, sweet, serene, and strong.
'*Look in thy heart and write!*' such was the word
In the wide woodlands, through the shadows, heard
By our own Household Bard, when on his ear
The Voices of the Night fell soft and clear.
And such the high behest which comes ofttimes
To the true Poet of all years and climes,

The Master Minstrel, from whose golden thought
The perfect types of human song are wrought,
To whom all men give place, and meaner things
Sink into Sabbath stillness while he sings.
Not so my week-day Muse; to me she cries,
Look through the world which all about you lies,
The noisy town, its common, daily life,
Flushed with coarse passions, hot with selfish strife,
The crowded street, the dens of Vice and Want,
The gilded halls where Pride and Fashion flaunt,
And from their mingled threads, the grave, the gay,
Weave, if you will, the Epic of To-Day.
"Forego," she cries, "the boyish dream of Fame,
Speak as you see, careless of praise or blame.
Draw at a venture; it may be, the point
Of your chance shaft shall pierce a yielding joint
In the stout harness of some veteran wrong,
Or full armed folly, in its vantage strong.
Let but the word be honest and sincere,
For him alone whose inner sight is clear

From mist of passion or of selfish fear,
The Truth, whiterobed, shall, like a Vestal, wait
Beside the shrine and sacred fires of Fate,
Whose touch ethereal gives the eye to see
Things as they are, not as they seem to be!"

I.

Firkin was worth Two Millions; his Inventory,
Of Real and Personal, told the pleasing story;
Two solid Millions, everybody said it,
Was not his name a luminous orb of credit?
Was not his praise in every city Bank?
Was he not foremost in the foremost rank
Of Merchant Princes, that invincible host,
The Empire City's proud, imperial boast,
Her veteran guard, whose brilliant cash advances,
Not with fixed bayonets and bristling lances,
But with sharp bargains and keen speculations,

Carry her eagles to remotest nations;
Bolder than ever Templars or Crusaders,
They sweep the distant seas, these daring Traders,
Than fabled Argonauts, or classic Cæsars,
They grasp the World, these modern Golden Fleecers!

Think not, in this last verse, my Muse evinces
The slightest disrespect to Merchant Princes;
There are whose hearts are large and frank and loyal,
Whose human nature, like their wealth, is royal;
In whose free hands the glittering, dangerous dust
Is not mere money, but a sacred trust;
Long may we keep their true, untainted line,
Such men are princes by a right divine.
Such was not Firkin; in his principality,
Worse than high treason was all liberality,
No ray of bounty, with unselfish cheer,
Threw its bright beam across that dark frontier,
Where every friendly grace of heart or hand

Was seized and forfeited as contraband.
You read it in his eye, dull, dark, and stern,
Which clutched the light, but grudged a kind return,
In genial glances, through the open day,
And with a shrewd suspicion turned away.
His hard, square features, like an iron safe,
Locked in his thoughts; no chance, unnoted waif
Of fugitive feeling, unawares betrayed
The inner man, or mental stock in trade.
The portly figure, with its solvent air,
Proclaimed to all the world the Millionnaire,
His purse and person both at fullest length,
And even the higher law which he obeyed,
With all his heart and soul and mind and strength,
To love his maker, for he was SELF-MADE!
Self-made, self-trained, self-willed, self-satisfied,
He was, himself, his daily boast and pride,
His wealth was all his own; had he not won it
With his own cunning skill? There shone upon it
No grateful memories of another's toil,

No flowers of friendship graced its sandy soil,
No ties ancestral linked it with the past,
As in his hard, close hands he held it fast.

I cannot trace the Firkin genealogy,
The Family Tree bore such a close analogy
To those rare Tropic plants which Nature shoots
Into mid-air without the aid of roots,
Whose swelling tumors, as they spread and mount,
Grow rank and flourish on their own account;
Or the queer hints which scandal whispered since
He grew to wealth, about our Merchant Prince,
Or make with fact what people said agree
Touching his origin and pedigree,
Or early efforts in the packing-line,
In which, like Venus, he had sprung from brine!
Wise is the child, they say, who knows his father,
A musty proverb, as he thought, for, rather,
Wiser for him if he could but ignore him,
And all the long, low line that went before him.

Now Firkin could not bear to be in debt
To anybody, even for existence,
And on the social ladder where he set
His foot, disdained an ancestor's assistance.
Not their dry bones, but his successful chase
Of solid fortune, was his ground of title,
He was the net proceeds of all his race,
And his Two Millions were his just requital,
For we must guage the worth of human adults,
As of mess pork, by total cash results.
Therefore it quite confounded and incensed him,
To think the world should point a sneer against him
Upon the score of birth or lineage ;
It was unjust to linger on the page,
And, in the Ledgers of old family pride,
Reckon the items on the debit side ;
Time's rapid finger should the line descend
And foot the credit at the final end.
So, as to all the space 'twixt Noah's ark
And his own life, the prudent Muse keeps dark,

The interval perfumed by that aroma,
Which wraps with mystery the birth of Homer,
Or breathes through History when she describes
Those trackless fugitives, the lost Ten Tribes!

He had a coat of arms, a very grand one,
Bran-new besides, and not a second-hand one;
A coat of many colors and devices,
One of the kind which bring the highest prices,
Bought at a Heraldry slop-shop, where they take
One's measure for such coats of every make,
And give the pick of all the crests and quarterings
Of ancient Barons, famous for their slaughterings,
And modern Dukes, famous—for nothing at all,
With points and bars and bearings, great and small,
Lions and unicorns, and beasts with wings,
And all the sinister bends of all the Kings.
To pay his way, he thought, he scarce could miss,
Into the best Society, with this
Depreciated scrip of sham gentility;
And, really, the artist showed a great facility

In cleverly managing to put as much on,
As could be crowded upon one escutcheon;
Instead of flaming shield, with fancy pattern,
And golden gules, bright as the rings of Saturn,
He chose a Silver Dollar, freshly minted,
And with bold touches and designs unstinted,
Traced with all manner of mystical freemasonry,
Made it a rampant, stylish bit of blazonry.
It was a sort of circular allegory
Of the Two Millions and their owner's glory.
This suited Firkin better than progenitors,
In longest line of Presidents or Senators;
He had it painted on his carriage doors,
Stamped on his spoons, and inlaid in his floors;
It shone, resplendent, on each piece of china;
No work of art, he fancied, could be finer,
When he beheld its lines, so bright and wavy,
Gleam in the soup and glimmer through the gravy!
Pleased as a child with every separate view,
Or a New Zealander with a fresh tattoo!

His Creed was simple as a Creed could be,
Firkin believed in things that he could see;
Things that were palpable to sight and touch,
That he could measure by the test 'how much,'
And grasp securely in his mental clutch.
He had a lively faith in the Five Senses,
They never cheated him with false pretences,
Nor put him off to doubtful evidences;
These and his mother wit were all his light—
What could be safer than to walk by sight?
"He had been young, and now was old," he said,
"But never had he seen the self-made man
Forsaken, nor his children begging bread,
Provided they pursued their father's plan,
All through their lives, as he himself had done,
And kept a sharp lookout for Number One!"
A golden rule, Firkin had early learned,
And every hour to good advantage turned;
This, and such precious maxims as abounded
In that pure word of riches, wisdom, health,
According to Poor Richard, as expounded

By Doctor Franklin, in his *Way to Wealth*,
Served him for law and gospel and tradition,
And he himself their luminous exposition.
These were the fiscal lights, in whose clear ray
He could divide the Universe, straightway,
Into the things that would and wouldn't pay.
By these he steered through all the straits of trade,
Where something must be risked, or nothing made;
These oft through Wall street, with its reefs and rocks,
And phantom ventures, launched from fancy stocks,
Had brought him safe from many a hazard rash,
His compass—caution, and his pole-star—cash.
And now, grown rich, these guided him, at will,
In the green pastures, by the waters still,
Of safe investment, whether in real estate,
At points not likely to depreciate,
Or bond and mortgage, or, his greater favorite,
Because it had a spice of risk to flavor it,
The quiet purchase, at the market rate,
Of first class paper, such as brokers bait

Their largest hooks with, when they lie in wait,
With every tempting minnow, fly and snare,
For that shy fish, the speckled Millionnaire
Who loves the shade, but, if that way it floats,
Likes a sly nibble at a batch of notes;
Firkin, shrewd fellow, with his sharpened sight,
Knew when precisely, and when not, to bite;
Lay in the dark, with his usurious eye,
Until some choice endorser happened by,
Or plump acceptor, and then took the fly.
At this nice sport, so fatal to so many,
It was his boast, he never lost a penny,
And the old boy, the brokers would repeat,
Was quite the keenest shaver in the street.
Thus active practice kept his faith alive,
Faith in himself and in the senses five,
The almighty Dollar, and its powers incessant,
In ready money and a paying Present;
However fair, he trusted no futurity
Which could not give collateral security.
Some men, he knew, believed, at least professed,

Faith in hereafters, which they dimly guessed;
The substance, he preferred, of things possessed!

And yet, he seemed devout; without much search,
You might have found, on any Sunday morning,
His visible coach, outside the visible church,
With green and gold its sacred front adorning.
A gorgeous coachman, somewhat flushed with sherry,
A footman, portly with perpetual dinners,
Waited, while Firkin in the sanctuary,
With many other 'miserable sinners,'
Cushioned the carnal man in drowsy pews,
Dozed over gilt-edged rubric, prayer and psalter,
Rose with the music, looked with liberal views,
On prima donnas, never known to falter,
In chant or solo, hymn, or anthem splendid,
And still enchanting when the chant was ended;
Then sat or knelt, grave as the altar bronzes,
And went through all the usual responses.

Those solemn prayers, those litanies sublime,
The ancient Church first taught the lips of Time,
Thenceforth to sound forever—as when first,
Flooded with light, the lips of Memnon burst
From their cold stillness, and rejoicing, gave,
Back to the flood of Day, its tide upborne
Of rarest harmony, wave answering wave,
Deep calling unto deep, Music to Morn!
Those lofty chants, first echoed under domes
Of starry midnight, or in catacombs
Where, by rude altars and sepulchral tombs,
Deep in the rocky earth, the vestal choirs
Rehearsed their music for the martyr fires;
Now swelled from lips of people or of priest,
To fall on Firkin's ear without the least
Responsive utterance, or the faintest notion
That they had any reference to devotion.
He liked the service, but, I grieve to state,
If it had been instead a service of plate,
He could have given a better estimate
Of its real value, for in truth our hero,

As to religious feeling stood at zero.
And had it chanced the universal Church,
In solid phalanx, without break or schism,
Had, on a sudden, taken a backward lurch,
Two thousand years or more, to Judaism,
Or from the Christian plunged into the Pagan,
And on its altars set up Jove or Dagon,
Firkin would still have worshipped with the crowd,
And at the newest shrine devoutly bowed,
Still offered up his weekly stint of praise,
In heathen darkness or the gospel's blaze,
With incense, or burnt offerings, or libations,
Alike unconscious of the innovations,
Save that he might, perhaps, in Wall street phrase,
Have noticed a slight change in the quotations!
Noticed, but heeded not, he could not give
His time to liturgies, nor even live
In all things like a good conservative,
Of the true modern stamp, whose orthodoxy
Does good through agents and serves God by proxy!
His view was this—religion he regarded

An institution not to be discarded,
Of no great use in Time, yet who shall say
But some new sphere may bring it into play?
Therefore he gave it half a day in seven,
'Twas well to keep on speaking terms with Heaven.
Let the priests wrangle, in their long debates,
Of doctrines, dogmas, destinies and dates,
He cared for none of these—nothing to him
Their dull disputes and superstitions dim,
They neither charmed his sense nor could they shock it,
They never put a dollar in his pocket;
(And very rarely took a dollar out,
As all the Charities can vouch, no doubt;)
He never cared to vex himself about them,
He got along so very well without them;
From Genesis straight on to Revelations,
He could dispense with all the Dispensations!

You may imagine that the philanthropic
Was not with him a very favorite topic;

One test he meted to the Sons of Time,
Success was virtue, Poverty was crime.
He who had failed in Life's scrub race to win,
Was justly punished for his mortal sin,
That deadliest style of human misbehaving,
The leaving undone of getting and of saving;
Wealth was man's normal state, its loss because
The losers violated Nature's laws,
And chose to live their vicious, penniless lives,
In spite of ants and beavers and bee-hives,
And other bright examples, by all which
She showed them clearly how they might grow rich.
Therefore, it was as plain as Trinity steeple,
That every scheme for aiding indigent people
Was with the worst of vices a connivance;
He turned with horror from the base contrivance.
This was his only theory to repress
The social evils, and their wrongs redress,
Save that in current cases of distress,
From paupers, as from pestilence, he shrank,
Upon the virtuous notion that "they drank!"

The newest way to christianize barbarity,
And whip in Temperance as a foe to Charity!

His politics took on the Neutral tints,
A safe complexion for a Merchant Prince,
Who valued Government for its protection
To wealth and capital against insurrection.
He thought that legislation should be planned,
And the great Ship of State equipped and manned,
Solely with reference to the property owners,
Those cabin passengers, our American Peerage,
While you and I, and other luckless Jonahs,
Who work the ship, or suffer in the steerage,
He reckoned dangerous chaps who raised the gales
Which roared and rattled through the spars and sails.
As for the rest, his hate was warm and hearty,
Against all politicians and each party.
No club or council held him in communion;
No doubtful canvass lured him into bets;
He never even helped to save the Union,

Or to pay off our greatest Statesman's debts;
Those fields of Golden Cloth, on which, 'tis said,
The Wall-street heroes very often bled!

Firkin was childless. In his earlier life,
He had possessed that useful thing, a wife,
But failing to keep pace with his swift stride,
In the hot dash at fortune, by his side,
Long since she faltered, faded, drooped, and died.
He kept his vow to cherish and to love her,
By building a great granite tomb above her,
Which to the world his wedded virtues told,
Just like them too, stiff, hollow, and stone cold!
She never knew a mother's tender duty,
Or else, perchance, its pure, fresh warmth and beauty
Her wasted heart with a new glow had fired,
And with a sacred strength her life inspired;
But, in her worse than widowhood, exiled,
Had taken to her heart an orphan child,
A daughter by adoption, upon whom,
After his spouse lay shrined within her tomb,

Firkin himself complacently had glanced,
And, step by step, had cautiously advanced,
Until she ruled his household; for his keen,
Sagacious foresight, in the girl, had seen
A quick, bright spirit, fitted for command,
And, for his own convenience, he had planned
That he would be her guardian and protector,
Till he could marry her to some Bank Director.

She was a fair New England maiden, born,
Not where broad fields of yellow wheat and corn,
Through sunlit valleys, wave and gaily tinge
The quiet homesteads with their golden fringe,
While Nature blends their warm and genial flush
In girlhood's budding glow and virgin blush;
Nor on the hill-sides of the distant North,
Where, from the unfenced forests gushing forth,
O'er rocky beds, sweep the swift mountain streams,
Whose sparkling torrent, as it leaps and gleams,
Is kindred to the keener flash that beams
From laughing eyes on pure unsullied faces,
While, like the Naiads, crowned with fabled graces,

They haunt and gladden those dark Maple shades,
Our fairer wood-nymphs, the Green Mountain maids!
But on the Eastern shore, where the waves break
On rocky headlands, and the night winds wake
The mournful echoes of the forest pines,
Which stretch along the coast their dreary lines;
And the sea-breezes, as they come and go,
On beauty's cheek have left a deeper glow,
And the eye kindles like some far off ship,
Struck with a sudden sunbeam, and the lip
Wears the sad smile of those whose calmer moods
Are nursed by Ocean sands and solitudes!

Such was this RACHEL; and her nature kept
Part of its early grace and seaside health,
In the spoiled city; in her soul it slept
And woke, sometimes half conscious, half by stealth,
In sudden pauses, its calm undertone
Heard by no other ear, scarce by her own,
Nerving the virtue which did not forsake her,

But kept its native beauty, fresh and green,
In spite of Stewart's and a French dressmaker,
And not put on and off, like crinoline—
Virtue, which drew its light and strength and love,
And sense of beauty, from a source above
The level of the mirror, or the date
Of the last mode, or newest fashion plate.
Firkin himself was puzzled to understand
If he or she had got the upper hand,
In the incessant skirmish and sword-play
Their spirits waged together for the sway
Over each other's will; for in the sphere,
Where woman's sense and wit are strong and clear,
In the wide circuit of the heart's dominions,
She had, and claimed, and kept, her own opinions,
Till he began to hate her, and, one day,
When she had given her heart and hand away,
Against his oft repeated, stern denial,
And brought his feeling to the final trial,

He threw her off, as lightly as the flower
Which in his button-hole had bloomed an hour,
Placed by her hand, perhaps, on some May morning;
The blow was struck without a moment's warning,
No present pity; for the past no thanks;
And quite forgetting all that bland urbanity,
Which so distinguished him in down-town Banks,
With its descent he mingled such profanity,
As suited rather, so my Muse just hints,
A Prince of Darkness, than a Merchant Prince!

He banished her, and then, in purest spite,
And to shut out forgiveness, the same night,
Wrote to his native town for half a score
Of distant relatives to fill her place;
They came, post haste, the invited ones and more,
A sudden invasion of the Firkin race,
Thrifty and sly to watch and lie in wait,
And peep and pry around his great estate.
To lay their plans and stratagems and traps,

And nurse, with hope, each vagrant, chance "perhaps"!
They felt his pulse when he was sound asleep,
Wondered how long the vital spark would keep,
And calculated by the Insurance Tables,
Those cunningly devised financial fables,
With long divisions, addings, and subtraction,
The value of his life, down to a fraction.
This sort of ante-mortem examination
Would have annoyed its subject, without doubt,
If ever by word, or act, or penetration,
Sooner or later, he had found them out;
But he dreamed not a soul within his portal
Harbored the thought that he was not immortal,
At least if so he pleased; with equal sense
They might have doubted his omnipotence!

Rachel was married, and, to tell the truth,
It was a foolish match, for Love and Youth,
In forming their copartnerships are rash,
Unless they have that special partner, Cash!

Love brought her grace and beauty as her dower,
And Youth his lofty hopes and dreams of power,
But on the wedding-day, ere that rapt hour
Of plighted vows, had grown a moment older,
The Husband tapped the Lover on the shoulder,
Like a Detective, with the frowning threat
Of present want of means and future debt.
For though his aims were high, and pure and sunny,
He had no faculty for making money,
That pocket compass by which Dulness steers
Its steady course to wealth through all the years,
While Genius, gazing at the stars, is tost
On trackless billows, founders, and is lost.
We sometimes ask, why is it, Nature pours
Into such leaden caskets such rich stores,
And in our wisdom blame and criticise her;
We may be wise, but Nature is much wiser,
She, in the coarser, heavier, baser mould
Of human character, runs her molten gold,
While higher spirits for herself she chooses,
And shapes and fashions to her finer uses!

But Rachel's husband, for his purse, alas!
Was one of that fine, brilliant, useless class,
The men of genius; in some luckier sphere,
Where every body should possess a clear,
Net income of, at least, ten thousand a year,
He might have been an ornament to society;
He was resplendent with that rare variety
Of tastes and faculties and mental gifts,
Which, like the rapid eagle pinion, lifts
The soul sublimely through the empyrean,
Where choirs of beauty chant their loftiest pæan;
But on descending, hungry, from those upper
Regions of song, goes starving for a supper.
He was a master of the theoretical,
The high-ideal, and the pure æsthetical,
The imaginary, mystic, and didactical,
In short, of every thing, except the practical.
His aims were glorious and his thoughts intense,
He wanted nothing, except common sense;
Could plan new worlds without the least misgiving,
But in this planet couldn't make a living.

The splendid purposes and lofty schemes,
In which he wasted life with golden dreams,
Might, in Utopia, have made him Lord
Of the ascendant, but they paid no board,
Washing, or lodging in the Fifteenth Ward.
He tried the various callings and professions
By which men get their honors and possessions,
But all their substance his weak grasp eluded,
And still he stood, despondent and deluded,
Upon the brink of Fortune, while her tide
Ebbed fast away, as there, in aimless pride,
He lingered, musing, to his doubts a slave;
While others boldy dashed into the wave,
Dived through the breakers with their frantic whirl,
And through the rocks and quicksands grasped the pearl.

He might have saved a moderate patrimony,
(Sufficient even after matrimony,)
But, like all men of vivid imagination,
He had a lingering love of speculation;

A fancy for those airy, brilliant bubbles,
By which the wealth of Wall Street daily doubles;
A fatal fondness for those works of art,
Which, by the thousand, into being start,
With their fine lines and delicate vignettes,
Putting the very best face upon the debts
Of Corporate bodies, who, as we all know,
Thrive for the most part upon what they owe!
There was no scheme, however visionary,
In which he could not be induced to bury
A little money and much expectation;
If there had been a Building Association
For putting up and selling Chateaux in Spain,
He had subscribed at once; and when, in vain,
Subscription on subscription had been heaped,
Share after share of stock, and nothing reaped,
He chanced one morning in the *Times* to see
The circular of the Gold Swamp Company,
Of which the money articles all said,
It was a certain project; for its head
Was Firkin, foremost among Millionnaires,
Who had just taken twenty thousand shares;

"Here," cried our unsuccessful friend, "at least,
Success is sure as daylight in the east,
Free from all chances, doubts, or cruel risks;
There must be golden harvests, and the disks,
Innumerable, of dollars, on the horizon
Of any scheme Firkin has fixed his eyes on!"
So he bought in, invested all he had,
And as the shares soon trebled and quadrupled,
With the hot fever of success run mad,
He lost his mental equipoise, nor scrupled
To borrow where he could, and still to buy,
For fact was fact, and figures could not lie.
Two months the bubble glittered, then, one morning,
Grew pale, and burst, without a moment's warning.
A grand catastrophe! The great Gold Swamp,
Inaugurated with such pride and pomp,
Only six weeks before, by an Excursion,
Of which we all perused the pleasing version,
In all the papers; graced by two ex-Presidents,
And all the city's most distinguished residents;

A splendid dinner, at which General Diddle
Headed the board, (a model in the middle,
Of the Gold Swamp and neighboring morasses,
Splendidly done in sugar and molasses),
Supported by a score of Peter Funks,
Of the mock Mining stamp, who deal in chunks
Of confidence ores and metals, as examples,
And sell the bowels of the earth by samples!
A brilliant festival, and when, quite late,
The Engineer, Twobottles, rose to state,
The Swamp was yielding at the fabulous rate
Of Fifty Millions monthly, the whole table
With cheers and tigers was a perfect Babel.
The Swamp, I say, though dressed in such bright raiment
Of hope and promise, failed, suspended payment,
Gave up its golden issues, and the news,
Which served a day the city to amuse,
Was soon abroad, that never, for one minute,
Had it contained a pennyweight of gold,
Save what had slyly been deposited in it,
By a smart brace of brokers, keen and bold,

For a new Fancy, and some plump amounts
With which to fatten their slim Bank accounts.
Firkin, the rumor also got about,
With his unerring prudence, had sold out,
The day of the Excursion, when the shares
Touched at the highest figure; and the affairs
Taking soon after a dubious situation,
He, with a burst of virtuous indignation,
Resigned at once the Presidential station!

This was the final blow. The poor stockholder,
Stunned by the crash, which even on a bolder,
Less sensitive nature, had fallen with crushing weight,
Struggled no longer with his adverse fate.
Two years of light and shade had quickly flown,
Since he and Rachel stood within the zone
Of wedded life, and, although overcast
By frowning fortunes, still, through all their Past,
Such golden memories flashed, as when the heat,
Sometimes in Summer, in its fervid throe

Behind the heavy clouds, will throb and beat,
And flood the darkness with its tender glow.
But now the present sorrow wore no face
Of hope or pity; from his own disgrace
He shrank, with shattered reason; for a space,
Cast frenzied glances on his wife and child,
Then sank in sad oblivion of will,
And thought and sense and sight and being, until,
Gently and calmly, on an Autumn day,
He lost his hold on life and passed away.

II.

Where should she go? How, from the solid spheres,
Hew out the fortune he had failed to carve?
A timid woman, trembling and in tears,
The world was all before her—where to starve!
The world, which never yet, with all its wit,
In any clever moment chanced to hit,
In its Malthusian theories of Man,
Or other muddy shoals quack sages swim in,
With social splashings, upon any plan
For getting rid of these unfortunate women!

Still, still they haunt us, at all times and places,
With their gaunt shapes and pale, imploring faces,
Still, still they plead by every tenderest tie,
For help and pity as we pass them by,
Or dole the pittance which we give and grudge,
Or thrust them back, with merciless hands, to drudge
In the scant spaces where we hem them in,
With metes and bounds of sex and caste, and then
Brand their impatience as a shame and sin,
And wicked trespass on the rights of men;
Mock their loud prayers with needles, thread, and shears,
And when they cry to Heaven, stop our ears;
In our cold wisdom harsher than the Turk,
He shuts them up for pleasure, we for work!

Thus in her widowhood, a prisoner,
In all the earth there was no place for her.
She was a lady once; there was the rub;
She had no heart to beg, no strength to scrub,
Or earn days' wages at the washing-tub;

And when she looked, as many a sorrowing sister,
Before and since, down that attractive Vista
Which opened to her sight with joys o'erflowing,
That charming view, a lifetime of plain sewing;
She found that all its fascinating scenery
Was quite cut up and ruined by machinery!
Just as the rapid rattle on the rail
Destroys the calm of some secluded vale.
She saw the new Invention's tiny shaft,
As in its nimble task it plied and ticked,
It seemed as if the wicked minion laughed
At the slow thimble, and the fingers pricked
With weary stitches, and cried out in glee,
Give up the race, you can't compete with me,
The seamstress sinks before the Patentee!

She looked for help to her own sex, to those
Strong-minded women who have come to blows
With all mankind, and publish their intentions
In fierce debates and furious Conventions;
To one of these she went and sat and wondered,
As the Olympian Junos stormed and thundered,

It was exciting, but the heated place
Threw not a ray of light upon her case.
She did not long to cut the social throat,
She did not want two husbands or one vote,
Or to discard her gentle, womanly nature,
For any seat in any Legislature.
If she had owned an acre, on its axis,
While the world turned, she would have paid her taxes,
With or without a representative,
For what she wanted was a chance to live,
A seat at Nature's table, and a share
In human sympathy and love and care.
Poor child! she found the march of Women's Rights
Is not for her who suffers, but who fights,
And the prime maxim, in its foremost van,
Not Love to Woman but Revenge on Man!

At last, when Hunger snapped the thread of Pride,
She went to Firkin; in the world beside,

She had no other hope, nor was this hope,
But the last glimmering ray by which to grope
Along the way which led, she knew not where,
Through the untrodden midnight of despair.
She sought him at his house, that lofty pile,
Built on the Avenue, in the latest style
Of Merchant Princes, grand, grotesque and florid,
Out of the finest freestone ever quarried.
In its erection, as he oft declared
To wondering visitors, no expense was spared,
And had he said, no order of architecture,
'Twould have been truer still, as I conjecture.
The builders, with their taste so fine and funny,
Laid themselves out, as well as Firkin's money,
And in a way that beggars all description,
Blended Corinthian, Gothic and Egyptian,
And other famous styles with classic rarities,
In one grand jumble of brown stone vulgarities.
'Twas bad enough outside, but once within,
It was like probing deeper than the skin,
Some mammoth fester, such its tainted mixtures
Of decorations, furniture and fixtures.

It seemed as if a bomb-shell, charged and loaded
With paint, and gilt, and plaster, had exploded,
Without regard to anybody's feelings,
On walls and columns, cornices, and ceilings.
The ambitious plasterers had eclipsed the builders,
And in their turn were outdone by the gilders;
The painters then—beside whose rich adorning,
The brightest rainbow would have seemed deep mourning;
From lowest basement up to topmost attic,
The whole was gorgeous, glaring and prismatic;
Pannelled and kalsomined, and striped, and starred,
Paint by the bucket, frescoes by the yard,
Laid on in thickest layers by battalions
Of exiled red Republican Italians!
With pots and brushes, blues and greens and yellows,
They scaled the walls, the bold, designing fellows,
And took the house by storm with their mythology,
Fruits, flowers, flamingoes, landscapes, and zoology,

Mermaids and Fauns, Arcadian shepherdesses,
Long in the ringlets, scanty in the dresses,
Heroes and gods and goddesses and ogres,
Nymphs in pink tunics, sages in red togas,
Heads of Old Masters, shaded somewhat duller,
And full length Venuses, all in flesh color!
Then following up the grand Two Million plan,
Where paint left off, upholstery began;
The latest artist at fresh marvels aims,
Acres of mirrors in prodigious frames,
And miles of damask, spread in rich expansion
Of gilt and crimson, through the costly mansion;
Incredible carpets, which outstared the ceiling,
With flaming hues that set the brain to reeling,
And with the walls in one fierce blaze united—
O what a sight, when all the gas was lighted,
And Firkin, seated with some fellow snob,
Surveyed the scene beneath the brilliant streamers,
Declared the parlors were "a splendid job,
Which went ahead of all the Collins steamers;
Taylor's saloon, when every jet is on;
Or the new Capitol at Washington!"

And echoed back the truthful observation,
"There's nothing like it in the whole creation!"

Here our poor widow sought the Millionnaire,
But little knew with what inveterate care,
His doors were bolted against all descriptions
Of paupers, agents, circulars and subscriptions.
Her poverty-stricken air at once detected,
By the smart footman, she was first inspected,
With his sharp scrutiny, like a thing infected;
And, lest the plague should any further go,
He quarantined her in the portico.
And, as there was no process of fumigation
By which to disinfect a poor relation,
Or long-discarded pensioner on probation,
Firkin gave orders she should be suppressed;
He sent a dollar, with the kind request
She would not call again, and the suggestion,
That it appeared to him beyond all question
She should proceed immediately out West!
She took the money, wished it had been more,
For her child's sake, then turned and left the door;

Upon the marble threshold, from her feet,
Shook off the dust, then shrank to her retreat,
A distant garret, where her sorrows and prayers
Climbed, with her aching feet, those weary stairs!

III.

It was a Summer's day in Winter, one
Of those rare noontides, when the distant Sun,
Sees the fair Earth, all dressed in virginal snow,
And woes her beauty with a warmer glow.
Firkin bethought him that he owned a row
Of Tenement Houses, taken for a debt,
From which his tardy Agent failed to get
The total monthly score of rent betimes;
"I'll go," he thought, "and visit him for his crimes,
Reduce his wages and increase the rent;
The investment only yields me ten per cent.,

And with such property one's only chance,
Is prompt collection, always in advance!"

The TENEMENT HOUSE, o'er which no friendly movement
Has waved the Enchanter's wand of "Modern Improvement,"
With half cracked walls and windows all askew,
Stamped with the blight of beggary through and through,
Lintel and door-post sprinkled with its sign,
House after house, extends the dismal line;
A dreary sight to philanthropic eyes,
Between the gutter and the distant skies,
By filth and noisome odors marked and tracked,
Through the dense districts where the poor are packed,
Crowded and swarming in those wretched hives,
Layer on layer of cheap human lives!
Or, if you think the picture overdrawn,
Go for yourself, if you have never gone;

Go in mid-winter, when the drifting sleet,
Through the bare hall pursues your freezing feet,
And, as from room to room you hurry past,
The crazy building rattling in the blast,
At doors ajar, gaunt faces peep and glare,
In hopes some friendly step may linger there.
Go in mid-summer—when the August rays
Pour on the place their fierce, untempered blaze;
From the scorched pavement to the sun-struck eaves,
No point of shade the flaming mass relieves,
And the hot air, with rank and poisonous breath,
Through doors and windows puffs disease and death.
Or go as Firkin went—on some bright day,
When all without glows in the cheerful ray;
And as your footsteps cross the mouldering sill,
Feel the cold dampness and the sudden chill
Strike through your shivering sense with omens ill:
He felt it not, through all the livelong year,
He walked, encircled in an atmosphere,

Filtered and rarified to that degree,
By his Two Million power of solvency,
That such impressions had no power of stealing
Into his perfect vacuum of feeling;
No squalid sights disturbed his calm repose,
Nor pity reached him even through his nose!
He gained the house, entered with stately air,
Sought the delinquent Agent everywhere,
In vain—then mounted, while each conscious stair
Creaked with the burden of the Millionnaire,
From loft to loft, up to the topmost floor;
Here paused for breath, when, suddenly, a door,
Blown by a vagrant gust, wide open flew,
And in that garret chamber, as he turned,
On the bare boards, before his startled view,
She stood disclosed—the hated and the spurned!

There, face to face, they stood; a breathless second,
Looked at each other; then she sternly beckoned;
There was a lightning flash within her eye,
There was a speaking grandeur in her form,
That cowed and awed him, though he knew not
why,

As the dumb beast quails from the coming storm
It dreads to meet, but sees not how to fly.
He crossed the sill; she pointed to the bed;
There lay her boy, his innocent, curly head,
Nestled upon the pillow, and his face
Lit with the solemn and unearthly grace
That crowns but once the children of our race;
God gives it when He takes them—he was dead!
A broken toy, a bunch of withered flowers,
In his thin hands were clasped, his breast above,
The last frail links that to this world of ours
Had bound the sufferer—save a mother's love.
How marble-white and fair—too fair to bury!
But Firkin had no taste for statuary,
Even of that rare style, perfect and pure,
Where Death and Beauty set their signature.
He saw and looked away, his dull, dark brow
Touched with no gleam of sympathy; but now
The latent lightning loosed, and flashed, and woke
The pent up tempest of her soul; it broke
With all that woman's frantic grief could pour,

Upon his guilty head, as she charged home
Her husband's death, her sweet child's martyrdom,
To his account, and bade him pay the score.
She paused a moment, as upon the dun,
Dark, city roofs that stretched below, the sun
Threw out its setting gleam, and lit the tips
Of tapering masts, where the great merchant ships
Lay at their wharves, and tinged the towering spires,
With the last flicker of its waning fires,
As all along the wintry sky they streamed.
She turned and saw; like one inspired she seemed,
With a prophetic fury, as of old,
Some fabled Pythoness whose oracles rolled
Along the Delphic shadows and foretold
The doom of empires. "Look! oh look!" she cried,
"The sun is setting on your pomp and pride;
See the great city, stretching through the light,
Its million pulses beating towards the night;

Think not for such as you it toils and groans,
In ceaseless struggles, for the very stones
Would cry aloud, were all its wealth like yours;
Know that the righteous Heaven scarce endures
Your hateful presence; nor can I; begone,
And with you take my loathing and my scorn.
The hour is near when you shall colder lie,
Than this poor babe who here has crept to die;
Then know that close behind your gorgeous hearse,
Shall follow in its train the Widow's curse,
And heavier than the marble, on you press,
The malediction of the Fatherless!"

Firkin was reckoned, as all Wall street knows,
A handsome speaker; self-made Ciceros,
With lungs for logic and for brains, effront'ry,
Are not uncommon in our growing country.
And when the Gold Swamp stockholders, of late,
Presented him with that grand piece of plate,
Upon declaring the extra Dividend,
In which they cleverly contrived to spend

Out of their Capital, the last cent of cash,
Just twenty days before the final smash,
He made a speech which all the Daily Press,
Flushed with champagne, pronounced a great success.
But now he's dumb; no public diner out,
Entirely unaccustomed and unprepared
For the occasion, ever looked about
In blanker silence; there he stood and stared,
Stupid and stunned, and when, with queenly air,
She waved him from her, like a worthless thing,
Shrank from her glance, in speechless terror, there,
Turned on his heel and went, the poisoned sting
Rankling and festering in the inmost core,
Of that self-love no shaft e'er pierced before.
He boiled with rage; he felt he had been tricked
Into the garret, and his person picked
Of all its dignity; his seething brain
With fury reeled and throbbed with sudden pain,
And a vague terror he could not restrain.
Still, as he hurried on his homeward track,
Upon his thought the garret scene came back,—

The desolate room, the corpse, the withered flower,
Her curse, the blight of all that sunset hour;
And in their wild disorder and confusion,
One thought still struggled upward—Retribution!
Haunted and dogged him, through the shadows dim,
Outran his heavy step, awaited him,
As through his spacious halls he passed and sought
His private chamber, where, with cunning wrought,
Cased in the solid wall, with massive locks
And bolts and bars, he kept his great, strong box.
There in the winter evenings he resorted,
His deeds and bonds and mortgages assorted,
Indulged in long financial lucubrations,
And laid his plans for future speculations.
Thither he hastened now, to cool the flame,
Kindled within by hate and scorn and shame;
Hour after hour, he sat and vainly tried,
In all his great estate, to bury and hide,
From his own sense, his galled and blasted pride.
He felt himself a beggar; had he dreamed,
Or was he really what, in thought, he seemed,

Bankrupt and penniless? From a secret till,
He drew and opened, with trembling hand, his
WILL,
That weighty document, on which depended
So much when once his lease of life was ended;
Perchance 'twould reassure him there to see
The whole Two Millions in epitome;
He grasps it firmly, 'tis no mockery!
But, as he grasps, why do his eyes grow dim,
And all the page before his senses swim?
There is no strange handwriting on the wall,
Through all the midnight hush no threatening call,
Nor on the marble floors the stealthy fall
Of fatal footstep. All is safe. Thou Fool,
The avenging Deities are shod with wool!
Nor in the air around, nor overhead,
We hear the sound or echo of their tread,
Nor catch the rustling of the rapid dart
That wings its errand to the victim's heart!

IV.

And there they found him; when the morning
broke,
And from their attic dreams the housemaids woke,
The earliest servant, while from floor to floor
She went, was startled as she passed the door.
The room was silent, but the light still burned,
And, wondering at the unwonted waste, she turned,
Looked in with curious eye, then at the sight,
Or what she thought she saw, started with fright;
Started, but checked a scream; looks in once
more,
Laughs, half in earnest, at her silly fears,

Then ventures in, with rapid step, uncertain,
And, breathless with fresh terror, draws the curtain,
Crimson and heavy; and the daylight peers
Through the great window, not a friendly visitor,
But with the cold, gray glance of an Inquisitor,
Searching and prying with malignant spite,
To drag some hidden horror to the light.
A moment, while her heart beats fast and faster,
The servant stands and looks upon her master;
One glance from head to foot, from foot to head,
Then through the house shouts, frantic—"*he is dead!*"

Soon, roused from sleep, the startled Family,
(Those Firkin Cousins, to the tenth degree)
From every room, rush to the fearful place,
Where, cold and rigid, with distorted face,
And stiffened limbs and fixed and ghastly glare,
He sits, a spectacle—but I forbear
The gross description, though the situation
Tempts to the tragic, with solicitation

To launch our song upon the tide that sets
Towards Melodramas and Police Gazettes,
Blood-red with horrors; let me rather screen
The dismal picture, and dismiss the scene.
Yet, ere it passes wholly from the thought,
By one strange sight the startled sense is caught;
Those outstretched hands, what is that they grasp
With clutch convulsive, in their iron clasp?
Half in each hand, a torn and crumpled roll—
What Sybil's mystic leaves, or fated scroll,
What pass, unchallenged, to the eternal ages,
That he should hold so fast those written pages?
They wonder, too, the crowd who stand and stare,
Grouped in the chamber, round the fatal chair,
Shocked and bewildered, striving to condense
Their vague, impalpable terror, to a sense
Of present evil. They, too, look and wonder
At the clinched hands and pages torn asunder;
Then swift suspicion follows on surprise,
They seize the fingers motionless and still,
Glance at the severed sheets with searching eyes,
And point and whisper, "'*tis the dead man's* WILL!"

Firkin's Last Will! But who may know the fact,
Whether destroyed by his deliberate act,
Or rent and shattered in his struggling clutch,
When, with convulsive throes, the sudden stroke
Shot through his frame, swift as the lightning touch
Shivers, with fatal flash, the heart of oak.
This is the question which they much revolve,
And long to guess and vainly seek to solve.
As through the halls and up the staircase grand,
The lifeless, heavy weight is upward borne,
Still, as he goes, he grasps in either hand
The rustling leaves, illegible and torn;
And when they lay him, like a child asleep,
Gently upon his bed, his fingers keep
Their desperate hold, and still returns the query,
With which their wits the anxious household weary,
How came it thus? by chance or act of sense,
And what, in either case, the consequence?
If torn unconsciously, is not the paper
His Will no less? A little wax, a taper,

If from his hands it can be loosed with care,
Are all it needs the damage to repair.
But is that wisest? it is undecided
As yet, entirely, what the Will provided,
To whom it shows his final generosity,
To whom his love, and whom his animosity;
Perhaps 'tis better to assume he meant
To leave behind him no last Testament,
And so destroyed it—but then who are heirs,
And what will be their rights, and what their shares?
One thing is certain, this they all agree—
"In this strange crisis, it is best to see
If 'tis a case of real Intestacy,
Without delay or further speculations.
How can we mourn and weep for him at ease,
Until we know, his sorrowful relations,
If we are Heirs at Law or Devisees?
This must be fixed beyond all contradiction,
And that at once—business before affliction!
We can postpone the heavier claims of sorrow,
The mourning won't be ready till to-morrow;
Besides, it is but just to the departed,

That the enquiry should at once be started,
He was so prompt, in life; at any rate,
It will not do that we degenerate;
Whatever happens to his fortune ample,
He has, at least, bequeathed us his example!"
So out of reverence, a new variety,
And touching instance of Collateral piety,
Before his form was dressed for its last journey,
The afflicted family sent for their Attorney!

Firkin had hated Lawyers all his life;
Not that he feared the risks of legal strife,
'Twas rather suited to his inclination
To keep a moderate stock of litigation.
But Lawyers were a class he never trusted,
Especially when their fees must be adjusted;
Like all this world's best things, he could not use them
Without a strong temptation to abuse them,
And that more heartily, because, no doubt,
They were the men who soonest found him out.

He was peculiarly hard and unforgiving
On those so lucky as to make a living.
Firkin, whose life was one long, shrewd device
To get the most by parting with the least,
The largest value for the smallest price,
(A notion not exclusively "down East,")
Disliked, on principle, these legal gentry,
Who dealt in something besides double entry;
And lost in quibbles, points and learned jargon,
Couldn't, to save their lives, drive a sharp bargain!
Why should they thrive, (in his wise way he said it,)
They had no capital and little credit;
And if 'twas talents helped them to their gains,
Why then there ought to be a tax on brains!
Besides, a weightier argument he founds—
The virtuous censor—on high moral grounds,
"He knew the law to be a knavish science,
Made to demoralize ingenuous clients;
Who ever saw a single instance yet,
Of any debtor sneaking out of debt,
By pleading usury or limitation,
Save by a lawyer's pen and penetration?

Who ever skulked behind the law's delay,
Unless some shrewd attorney showed the way,
By his superior skill got the ascendant,
And let astray the innocent defendant?"
'Twas touching, quite, his horror when he saw,
How Lawyers set aside the Moral Law.
Thus, under cover of the Decalogue,
He aimed and fired, through thickest mental fog,
His red-hot shot at that suspicious craft,
The New York Bar, and raked them fore and aft.
Protesting ever, as his firm conviction,
An honest Lawyer was a Legal Fiction!

Yet he employed one; in his dangerous hands,
Trusted the title deeds of all his lands;
Breathed in his ear his choicest confidence;
Drew from his subtle mind its keenest sense;
Taxed him with problems, new and strange, and kept
His tired brain working, while his client slept.
He loved to see the Athletes of the Bar,
Foot-sore and dusty, chase the gilded car

Of wealth, and feel, keen as the driver's lash,
In all their strength, their conscious need of cash.
He liked to have their learning and their skill
Drudge in his cause, like Samson at the mill,
Then, in the reckoning, grudged a greater latitude
For their requital than his scanty gratitude!

Well, let it pass; his prejudice, perchance,
Was partly envy, partly ignorance;
And most the latter, for the loudest bark,
As we all know, is always in the dark!

The Man of Law obeys the early warning,
Which summoned him to seek the house of mourning;
His measured footsteps crossed the marble hall,
And, scarce perceived, he entered where they all
Waited his coming; not in mute suspense,
But with loud strife, impatient and intense.
They had contrived, I know not in what way,
To extricate the Will, and there it lay—
Its separate fragments strewn upon the table,
And all its items, as they best were able,

They had deciphered—some with eager pleasure,
Some with vexation which no words can measure;
For those were well endowed, who nothing merited,
These scarcely mentioned, or quite disinherited!
I cannot pause to give the long deduction,
But to the family peace it was destruction!
At once two parties, in that house of Death,
Sprang into life, full armed, with poisoned breath,
"*Will*" and "*No Will*," their test and shibboleth.
And, when the Lawyer came, both sets of heirs
Pounced fiercely on him, claiming he was theirs.
He calmed the uproar, heard the story through,
And strove in vain to catch its hidden clue.
To tear his Will had Firkin really meant,
Or was it only a strange accident?
Perchance a question purely of intent,
Perchance of doubtful law; in either view,
The case was novel and the point was new;
And, it was plain at the first observation
Good for a Trojan War of litigation.

Straight on the lawyer's clear, prophetic sight,
The Firkin Will Case rises into light,
Latest and greatest of the famous causes,
About last wills, their codicils and clauses.
He sees the eager birds of prey who wait,
Around the carcase of the huge estate,
In the dim chambers of the Surrogate;
Three bulky quartos stuffed with the proceedings,
Ten leading Lawyers crammed with special pleadings;
A hundred witnesses on either side,
With cross examinations scarified;
And twenty Doctors, portly and persistent,
With twenty theories, all inconsistent!
But, fairest sight of all, besides, he sees
A princely revenue of costs and fees,
No risk of loss, no client to be dunned,
All the expenses charged upon the Fund!
Here was Temptation. Here, too, Opportunity
To plead for peace, domestic love, and unity.
A Lawyer's duty, as its line he saw,
Was first to keep his clients out of law!

He seized the occasion; while his sallow face
Flushed with the unwonted theme, he snatched a grace,
Beyond the utmost reach of Coke or Chitty,
And half in honest scorn, and half in pity,
While all his hearers marvelled as he spoke,
Thus from his lips his stern remonstrance broke:

"My Friends, this should be settled! Mend the Will,
Mend it and prove it and thereby fulfil
The better law of love, and kindly waive
All thought of strife above the new made grave.
Close the estate as in the Will provided,
But with the agreement, that it be divided,
By those who take, in just and generous shares,
Among all parties claiming to be heirs.
Take my advice, the best in all such cases,
And come to terms upon this liberal basis.
Who fights to the end may win, but doubly wise
Who knows the moment when to compromise,

And, for a bird in hand, forbears to push
A doubtful search for two inside the bush.
So thought the Allies, when they changed the venue
From Crimean trenches, batteries and tents,
To that Round Table, where the very men you
Had lately known as fierce belligerents,
Sat down to still the tempest that they woke,
The fettered hands of Commerce to release,
To sign preliminaries, and to smoke,
If not the pipe, the mild cigar of Peace!
Do as they did; relinquish every laurel
That might be won in this grand family quarrel,
And like fair, Christian men, settle betimes;
Blunders in such contingencies are crimes.
If not the plan I hint, propose another,
Necessity is still Invention's mother;
And surely in this case, without delay,
A method may be found, if, as they say,
Wherever there's a WILL there is a way!

"But if you find, between conflicting views,

And jarring claims, too great disparity,
Give the whole fortune (which they won't refuse)
To some deserving city Charity;
Or, if this fails, then, as a last resort,
Stay all proceedings, cut the matter short,
Fly from the law and juries and reporters,
Change the Two Millions into solid metal,
And sink the bullion in the deepest waters
This side the Narrows—rather than not settle!
Far better thus than make your names a handle
For public ridicule and private scandal;
Far better thus than drag through all the Courts,
To point Opinions and to swell Reports;
To make the rich man shudder as he sees
How swift a curse, what dire calamities,
May wait upon the wealthiest, for whom—
Equal with beggars in the final doom—
Death is appointed, with its unknown ills,
And after death—the probate of their Wills;
The ruinous vices, or the endless hate,
Too oft distributed with their estate,

Or the hot haste which, in one generation,
Squanders a lifetime's slow accumulation.
To make the poor man, in his worst despair,
Thank God, at least, he's not a Millionnaire!
To lie—scarce coffined in his marble vault,
Scarce hushed the echo of the funeral prayers,
Ere, overhead, begins the fierce assault,
And deadly struggle of contending heirs;
Ruthless of memory or of honest fame;
Reckless of virtues, earlier or later;
And sinking even the once honored name,
In that post-mortem title—the TESTATOR!"

He ceased; none answered, save one metaphysical
Young lady, whom the family thought satirical,
Remarked, aside, with glances somewhat quizzical,
That, really, the affair was quite a miracle—
SATAN reproving SIN—the peroration
Of the distinguished Counsellor's oration,
Where he alluded to Virtue with such force,
Would have been more appropriate, of course,

Were it not known that of that useful article
The late lamented never had a particle!

And did they settle as their Counsel bid?
My precious Reader, do you think they did?
He left the house; his fruitless task was done;
And soon the clients following, one by one
(Each, eager in the race to be the winner),
Retained a dozen Lawyers before dinner!

Meanwhile, a hundred rumors took the air;
"Firkin was dead, the famous Millionnaire,
Found dead at daylight, sitting in his chair,
His breath quite gone, the vital spark extinct."
This was the first report, startling and strange,
Posted on bulletins and heard on 'Change;
Sadder the story scarce could be, or shorter.
Indeed, our valued friend, the News Reporter,
Found it, at once, entirely too succinct
To serve his purpose. An event so solemn
Should furnish solid matter for a column,

And to despatch it in a paragraph
Were to disgrace the Associated Press,
And bring discredit on that gallant staff
Of short-hand Templars, at whose challenge dreaded
Each faintest whisper, each remotest guess,
A CITY ITEM stands, in line and leaded,
To pierce from Wall street to the Wilderness.
'Twas not enough the matter was so serious,
ITEMS determined it should be mysterious;
A flood of rumors must be got about,
The public head must have a rush of doubt,
The public sense be stunned with contradiction,
Then kept alive with stimulants and friction.
So at the first announcement Items hinted
That strange developments would soon be printed,
Then in loud whispers, like a stage "Aside,"
Gave out vague inklings about "Suicide"—
"Death by his own rash act"—the hidden clue,
Domestic troubles none but Items knew,
Financial storms, not dreamed of in the street,
Till Items should divulge the balance-sheet.

This fires the train—the incendiaries throw
Upon the town, completely to perplex it,
The choice of weapons for the fatal blow
By which poor Firkin made his final exit;
A master stroke, for the whole point is now,
Not *did* he kill himself, but only *how?*
But O, sagacious Items, well you know
How wise to have two strings to one long bow,
Discreetly, therefore, at the self-same time,
You give oracular hints of darker crime—
"Firkin a suicide! nothing absurder,
Murder will out, and what is this but murder?"
Perchance a luckier venture than the first,
The public likes so well to know the worst,
And with the latest horror slake the thirst,
The old, original, human thirst for blood,
Whose savage scent, keen as in kite or vulture,
Still filters down from our primeval mud,
Through the pure Parian of our modern Culture.
But, about noon, both theories exploded—
A fatal issue, Items had foreboded,

But still the veteran energies contrive
To fan the spark and keep the fire alive;
Suppose he died a natural death, what then?
Of course he must, like all distinguished men,
Have uttered some last words, and what were they?
FIRKIN'S LAST WORDS! Items alone can say.
One version ran that, turning to the wall,
He said something profound about the *Fall*,
But the narrator somehow had forgotten,
Whether he meant the Fall of Man, or Cotton.
Another, that, before his eyes were fixed, he
Said he should go at taker's option—sixty!
Another still, to show his mental vigor,
Put on his lips this sentiment sublime,
That he had lived up to his final figure,
Just one per cent. of all recorded Time!
But, of a sudden, this new blaze went out,
And left involved in blackest, midnight doubt
Firkin's last words, like (though I hate comparisons)
Great William Pitt's or good old General Harrison's!
For now the story of the Will, at last,
Is in the wind, and flying free and fast;

Items must haste the rumor to sequestrate,
And tell the World that Firkin died intestate!

And the World listens, with its greedy ears,
And in the midst of all its cares and fears,
Its toils and troubles, stands a moment still
To ask if, really, Firkin left no Will?
And then to question, doubt and speculate,
What will become of his immense estate?
Or may not yet the damaged Will suffice,
Why should the Statute be so over nice?
Oh fond and foolish World! why waste a thought
On these vain matters which concern you not;
Let the Two Millions tremble in the scales,
What odds to you whichever side prevails?
Oh captious Cynic, thus the World replies,
Our empty pockets do not blind our eyes;
A solid fortune, though not half a dime
Come to our fingers, is a sight sublime;
That which is rarest still the most will please;
Why to the distant Alps and Pyrenees,

And Apennine and Tyrol do you roam,
When there are lakes and mountains here at
home?
While you indulge your errant fancies yonder,
Leave us our home-made visions of Golconda,
Let us enjoy in all its golden glare
The distant prospect of the Millionnaire!

But most of all this sudden stroke of fate,
Provoked the Legal world to high debate;
The grateful Bar, with tears in all its eyes,
Sees that in Firkin's death it draws a prize;
That he, like many of our rich Patricians,
Who all their lives have grudged a counsel fee,
Quarrelled with Costs and Term fees and commis-
sions,
The Law and Lawyers—after death would be,
In spite of every adverse prepossession,
A liberal patron of the learned profession.
In clearest light the admiring Bar foresaw,
Firkin would live immortal in the Law,

His fame should rise sublime, in after ages,
To heights, in life, he never dreamed to clamber,
His name embalmed in scores of legal pages
In lucid dicta, like a fly in amber!
Great was the strife through all the Bar's dominions,
Grave were the doubts, conflicting the opinions,
From Judges down to those ambitious Students,
Who, in the dawning light of Jurisprudence,
With their long weapons and tremendous aim,
In bogs of Practice bag their legal game;
Or, after nobler sport, pursue the scent
Of those stanch pointers, Blackstone—Story—Kent!
Long they discuss, in all those smoky places,
Where, after Court, they show their hairy faces,
The novel topic in all points of view,
And strive to cut the Gordian knot in two.
Their bristling Points and their uncommon Pleas,
Their large citations of authorities
Are not reported; but, by way of sample,
I rescue from oblivion one example:

"If I were Counsel," cried one youthful jurist,
"I would maintain the Will; that side is surest.
Is it not known our highest Court, of late,
Decided that hop-poles are Real Estate!
(Though piled and stacked in barns,) upon the ground,
That they were once united with the soil;
And following out this reasoning profound,
Does it require from me the slightest toil,"
Proceeds our advocate, with gestures fiery,
"To show on principle, the great inquiry,
Touching the Firkin Will is only, whether
The severed parts had ever been together!"

Some hours before, when first the stir began,
They brought the Rector word; the worthy man,
Shocked at the dismal news, sat down to plan
A funeral sermon for the great occasion,
Which should convey, from every earthly station,
The richest member of his congregation.
Richest, smooth phrase which, with its silken rarity,
Covers as great a swarm of sins as Charity,

And even with the strict ecclesiastic,
Watching benignly o'er his city fold,
So often swerves his sense, with influence plastic,
Against their vices to offset their gold;
For human nature to itself is true,
And still the same in pulpit and in pew.
Nay, never start and frown, with aspect sinister,
My worthy Madam, I don't mean *your* Minister!
But only Firkin's! O, my clerical friend,
Your knee should surely be the last to bend
In Mammon worship; for the Priest and Preacher,
Should, like his Master, aim to be the Teacher
And friend of every man who walks the Earth,
Without inquiring—"How much is he worth?"
But tell me, you, whose polished periods poured,
In vain, on Firkin, while he slept and snored,
Snug in the tufted velvet; you who have
The Wealthy with you always, can you brave
The social tyrannies, whose iron heel,
Tramples on Christian love and faith and zeal,
And makes God's poor almost an exiled race,
Even from the open Temples of His grace?

Say, in your sympathies, who largest shares,
Or in your secret sighs, or public prayers,
This well-endowed, well-clad, well-fed parishioner,
Close by the chancel, or that poor petitioner,
Who hides and worships in the distant gallery,
And never paid a penny towards your salary?
Say which you welcome with the warmest smiles,
These brilliant butterflies, whose dazzling files,
In rustling silks, sweep through the sacred aisles;
Or that sad sister, half ashamed to go,
And praise her Maker, dressed in calico!
Say, for these queries you can best determine,
What is the aim in that grand charity sermon,
Full of fine Points, which you shall preach to-night,
Dives' subscription, payable at sight,
Or yonder widow's prayer and widow's mite?
There is who marks them both; there is who weighs,
In His just hands, the offering and its praise,
With whom the test of that unerring trial,
Is not the Dollar, but the Self-Denial!

But this is episode—its innocent source,
Firkin's unwritten Funeral Discourse,
For which our Clerical friend is sore perplexed,
Where to discover an appropriate Text!
In vain, on eulogistic thoughts intent,
He turned the pages of his Testament.
Skipped the Beatitudes. The place passed by,
About the camel and the needle's eye;
Wisely discarded too, as extra hazardous,
The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus!
Gave up the Gospels; hurried past the facts
Narrated of the early Church, in Acts,
Especially those which state the primitive way
They held all things in common at that day,
(A dangerous theory, to our times unsuited,
And which the Rector had himself refuted,)
Then through the Epistles, but no word was there
From which to canonize a Millionnaire,
But solemn warnings, ranking wealth and stations,
Not with God's blessings, but the World's tempta-
tions,

And flaming words, which, like the sword that
turned,
Each way before the gates of Eden, burned
With the swift flash of vengeance, and foretold
Garments moth-eaten, and the cankered gold,
And treasures heaped together for the days,
Which should be lurid with their final blaze!

At last he gave it up; then thought that since,
'Twas not the Christian, but the Merchant Prince,
He was to praise and bury—it was best
To bring his virtues to the easier test
Of worldly wisdom; plant its fairest laurel
On Firkin's brow, and point its finest moral.
The task was easy now; the Rector took
Once more, with lightened heart, the sacred Book,
Turned back the leaves, and chose, with tact surprising,
A text from Proverbs, about early rising!

Thus, through the fevered hours, that busy day,
So full of Firkin, slowly wore away,
Until the Night came down, with friendly pity,
To breathe its blessing o'er the troubled City.
And while the Twilight deepens, far and near,
One word, my Reader, in your private ear—
The Will was left untouched. On its first head,
The Funeral Discourse was knocked and killed;
The Last Words, taken back, were all unsaid;
The sapient Bar's predictions unfulfilled;
The dozen Lawyers left without their fees;
And all the Castles in the air which reared
Their golden towers before the devisees,
Were mined and stormed, blew up and disappeared—
One little fact this fearful ruin spread,
To tell the plain truth, Firkin WASN'T DEAD!

V.

Once more, a single moment, and the scene
Shifts to the garret; but no Tragedy Queen
Discloses now, her proud, swift vengeance heaping
Upon her victim—only a woman—weeping!
The child was buried; its rude grave, unstrewn
With wreath or flower, unmarked by slab or stone,
Was closed, and she was in the world alone.
In the calm twilight, while the shadows crept
Gently around, as if to soothe her grief,
Over her drear, parched heart, suddenly swept
A shower of tears, kind Nature's best relief.

She wept—and for a moment seemed to know,
In spite of Want, the luxury of Woe!
She wept—like water from the riven rock,
In the dry desert, gushed those unchecked tears;
A moment only, for a loud, long knock,
And heavy footstep, at the door she hears,
And the same instant, ere the sound is spent,
The Agent enters. Has he come for rent?

He was good-humored, though a Rent Collector,
Of shiftless tenants oft the kind protector,
His human nature he did not forget,
And in his heart there was some room to let!
He liked the lodger on the topmost floor,
And knew her for a lady, long before
He learned the truth, by listening near the door,
When Firkin was within (for he was there,
Though all unheeded by our Millionnaire);
And now he came, in haste and out of breath,
To tell the story of the sudden death,
And the torn Will, by which, he thought, perchance,
She too might share the great inheritance;

For he imagined that, in fact, she stood
Linked to the Landlord by some tie of blood.
But this she heeded not, nor even heard;
Her sense was stunned by that first fearful word.
Could it be so? And was he really dead,
Her curse still resting on his aged head!
O, fatal passion! As she hoped for Heaven,
His cruel wrongs to her were all forgiven,
For though, in her wild grief, on him she cast
The heavy forfeit of her ruined Past,
And of her blighted, hopeless Future, yet
Her better Nature cancelled all the debt!

Quickly she rose, and from the place she passed;
One backward glance she gave—it was the last—
At the dark Tenement house, forlorn and cheerless;
One eager glance, before; then, swift and fearless,
Through deepening night, beneath the stars' pure ray,
With rapid footstep, hurries on her way.

Blessings go with her! Never, by pity led,
A truer heart on holier errand sped;
She little knows what sacred honors wait
To crown her brow, beyond the unfolding gate
Through which she passes, from her low estate
To her high mission; but good Angels ask
To cheer and guide her in her noble task!

And now she stands within the spacious room,
Where, on his lonely couch, he lies in state;
A single light streams through the silent gloom,
And burns above him, like the torch of Fate.
The house is silent, for the troop of heirs
Are absent, busied with their new affairs
Which Wealth, though distant, shadows with its cares.
The frightened servants, left alone with Death,
Move softly round and speak with whispered breath;
The dread of Apoplexy and the Devil,
Has even made the pompous footman civil;

Rachel had entered freely, and the kind
But drowsy housemaids, willingly resigned,
At her entreaty, the sad charge, to keep
Watch by the bedside of that last, long sleep.
They left her there with him, once more alone;
But oh, how changed, since those few hours had flown;
Then all was scorn and hate; now, pure and warm,
Love keeps its vigil by that stricken form.
She clasps his heavy hand, she bends and kneels;
How deep the shade that o'er her senses steals,
For Death, still following in one beaten track,
With each new sorrow brings the old griefs back;
And as she meekly bows her weary head,
She weeps for all her Lost and all her Dead!

Look, Rachel! Look! Start from your bended knees!
Your touch has thrilled him; look—he stirs, he sees!
Breathless, she watches. Yes! he sees, he stirs,
His opening eyes are fastened upon hers!

Then close convulsive, as when one who shakes
A frightful dream away, and wildly wakes,
Sees its worst terror waiting by his side!
Her form; *her* face; the strange sepulchral gloom—
Is this the hour of vengeance—she the Guide
To light his footsteps to the final Doom!
Breathless, she watches. Once again, his glance
Struggles with upward gleam from that strange trance;
But now its dim foreboding meets the grace
That pours upon him from her loving face,
To calm his fear; once more his eyelids raise;
He clings to her with speechless, lingering gaze;
One long, imploring look, as if to say—
"What horrid Night is this? Oh, lead me back to Day!"

She led him back; from that dark, dismal night,
A Wreck and Ruin. For the fearful stroke
Had shattered all his frame and left its blight
On all his senses. Nevermore they woke

To that quick vigor which before he prized
As all of life; broken and paralyzed,
With shrunken, wasted form, he draws his breath
In that dim Border Land 'twixt Life and Death.
Yet not unblessed, for in the fatal thrill
Which rent his spirit, like his own torn Will,
It seemed as if some human springs which lay,
Unknown, within him, hidden far away,
Under the worthless rubbish of his wealth,
Were all unlocked; and now, as if by stealth,
The light of Heaven creeps through his tremulous sense,
And sheds its grace on his late penitence!

She leads him back to Day; no hand but hers
To all his hourly needs administers;
Far from the town she guides his tottering feet,
And, in the stillness of that calm retreat,
From her sweet voice he learns the alphabet
Of Truth and Duty, and his lips repeat
The prayers of childhood, and his brow is wet
With the baptismal seal which Love has set

Upon its furrows. Still to her he clings,
His Guardian Angel, whose o'ershadowing wings
Shelter his weakness, while her steady hand
Upholds, and leads him towards the Better Land!

His wealth remains; a burden and a care,
But cheats no longer, with its empty glare,
His spirit, rescued from the fatal snare.
On her he heaps it; grateful, while he sees
Her hands dispense their noiseless charities.
Her's the Two Millions; but how poor and cheap,
And mean and worthless, is the glittering store,
Beside her Treasures, which the Heavens keep,
Whither her broken Heart has gone before!
Whither, in all her night of toil, she turns,
For the far distant dawning, prays and yearns,
And while each deepening shadow round her falls,
She waits, like MARY, till the MASTER calls!

Nor waits alone. Such have there ever been,
Since human grief has followed human sin—

The patient, perfect Women! As they climb,
With bleeding feet, the flinty crags of Time,
Not for the praise of man, or earth's renown,
They bear the cross and wear the martyr's crown.
Though Queenly medal, stamped with Royal Heads,
Their humble toil to endless honor weds;
Though, like a bow of Hope, their fame is bent,
From side to side of each broad Continent;
And pictured Volume, with its tinted page,
Bears their meek features to the coming Age;
A higher joy their gentle spirits reap,
Where, all unknown, their silent watch they keep,
Far from the echo of the world's applause,
Through sultry noon, or midnight's dreary pause—
Where helpless infants gasp their parting breath,
Cradled in sorrow and baptized with Death;
Or strong men, tossing, with delirious lips,
In fever-tempests and the mind's eclipse,
Plunge through the starless storm, like foundering ships;

Or Old Age, shrinking from the tyrant's clutch,
Feels, through the darkness, for their tender touch—
Watching and waiting, till the rising Morn
Shall greet their saintly faces, pale and worn
With the long vigil, as they steal away,
Through darkened chambers, at the dawn of day,
Unloose the casement to the early air;
Hail its pure radiance with their purer prayer;
Drink in fresh courage with its quickening breath;
Then shut the sunlight from the bed of Death,
But bear, serenely, to the sufferer's side
A brighter beauty than the Morning-tide,
Faith's golden dawning which, from heights above,
Transfigures Toil to Joy! Duty to Love!
No eye beholding, save their risen Lord's,
Who sees in secret but in sight rewards!
Their fairest earthly crown, the wreath that twines,
Not round loud Platforms, or proud Senate Domes,
But those pure Altars, those perpetual Shrines,
Which grace and gladden all our SAXON HOMES!

THE END.

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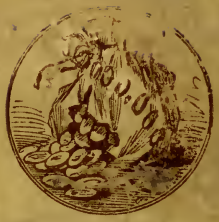
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